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AUTHOR Berkove, Lawrence I.
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ABSTRACT

The present expansion in the American literary canon has largely overlooked one of the richest sources for new material: authors who were known and respected in their own time but have been unjustly neglected or forgotten, and important literary material which is either unknown or forgotten because it exists only in back issues of unexplored periodicals. American literary periodicals constitute not only an important underutilized resource but one which must be systemically developed if American literary scholarship is to avoid preciosity. The American canon cannot be complete until a more systematic search is carried out for "new" lost or forgotten works by known authors, and for "new" old authors who have been accidentally or mistakenly lost and forgotten. Research and study must be undertaken not just for major authors but also for neglected authors of merit. (Sixteen notes are included.) (RS)

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New Old Additions to the American Canon

Lawrence I. Berkove
Univ. of Michigan-Dearborn

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New Old Additions to the American Canon

The present expansion in the American canon has largely overlooked one of the richest sources for new material: what I call new old additions. I include in this category authors who were known and respected in their own time but have been unjustly neglected or forgotten since. I also include important literary material which is either unknown or forgotten because it exists only in back issues of unexplored periodicals. It will be my position in this talk that American literary periodicals constitute not only an important underutilized resource but one which must be systematically developed if American literary scholarship is to avoid preciosity. Most of my examples will be drawn from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries but what I have to say about this field applies equally well to the Federalist period and the rest of the twentieth century.

F.O. Mattheissen, in his American Renaissance, undoubtedly selected the literary cream of the nineteenth century. When that book was still relatively new, the whole topic of "classical" American authors was thrown open and it made sense to explore the major and even minor works of the great authors and such major literary movements as transcendentalism and realism. A glance at the PMLA bibliography, however, will show that fifty years after Mattheissen's book, we are devoting a disproportionate amount of our efforts to re-examining re-examinations of the same authors and movements he recommended.

Even the way we categorize literature has excluded some writers. For years we have divided the nineteenth century into two general categories: romanticism and realism. Only recently have we have begun to recognize that some genres from the late nineteenth century do not fit either category: e.g. science fiction, fantasy, humor, utopianism, and mythology. There are still too many "new" old authors, good works, and micro-movements we have yet to discover to be final about the range and nature of our national literature. All of these, fortunately, have not evaporated into thin air; even when not published in books they may still be found in periodicals. It is time that we turn more of our attention to other aspects of American literature, to other authors, and to new material.

None of the "classical" authors developed in a literary vacuum; all were familiar with the works of other authors and were shaped in unguessed ways by the necessities of financial survival and artistic growth. In reconstructing and re-examining the literary contexts of our exceptional authors we will not have to resign ourselves to inferior material nor will we have to invent new categories or develop subtle new techniques of analysis. The contextual evidence is still there, mainly in unstudied American periodicals, and a surprising amount of it is either valuable literature or valuable literary history. In consists of experimental ventures of known authors, early versions of works which were subsequently refined, and literary compositions that were frankly written for pay. It consists of background information about authors: interviews, reviews, and reporters'

accounts of speeches. It consists of neglected or even unknown authors of merit who were participating in some aspect of the time. We already conduct this kind of thorough research for major authors. I now say we must do it on a wider scale primarily because it is good research practice and ought to be regarded as what is due all known literary figures but also because it can be employed as a screening technique to locate new authors. From what has already been done in this area, it is obvious that much more important material is easily available, ready to hand but unused. But before we can analyze this information, it must be gathered from periodicals and organized.

The vastness of the periodical resource can only be guessed at. From the eighteenth century to the present, there have been thousands of magazines that can be called "literary" with some degree of justification. Toward the latter part of the nineteenth century they proliferated very rapidly; there are probably few authors from this period who were not connected with at least several journals at some time in their career.

Newspapers were even more abundant. According to Peter Lyon, there were almost 1200 dailies in 1884, and they increased in number 100 a year during the next decade. He further reports than an English visitor to America in 1885 estimated that America at that time had one newspaper for every 10,000 inhabitants, whereas England and Ireland had one newspaper for every 120,000.[1] Alfred Lee reports that the peak was reached in 1909, when more

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[1] Lyon, Peter. Success Story: The Life and Times of S.S. McClure. New York: Scribner's, 1963. 72-73.

than 2600 daily newspapers were being published in the United States.[2] If we include weekly newspapers, the number of periodicals would be significantly higher.

It is important to know, in our age of the diminishing importance of newspapers and popular magazines, that it was once very different. Nineteenth-century American newspapers were often organs of popular education as well as of news. Almost any period newspaper, even those from small towns, if scanned for a month or so, will contain material which will be surprising to most modern readers. For example, at least once many newspapers a week ran short stories and poetry somewhere in the issue, even on the front page. They frequently gave prominence to articles on science, history, and comparative religion. Humor items were also featured on a regular basis. Most newspapers used what were called "exchange" items--stories or features simply borrowed from other newspapers. Often these exchange items were written by authors all of us would recognize.

Mark Twain is an excellent case in point as we are still recovering new material by and about Twain from periodicals. There is, for example, no complete file of the Virginia City, Nevada, Territorial Enterprises, upon which his serious literary career may be said to have been launched, but some important articles he wrote in issues now missing have been recovered from files of local newspapers in Nevada and California, which reprinted those Enterprise articles as exchange items. Just a year ago Edgar

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[2] Lee, Alfred M. The Daily Newspaper in America. Quoted in Lyon, pp. 72-73.

Branch published important historical facts about Twain's piloting career gleaned from the files of Mississippi river town newspapers.[3] I have serendipitously found articles by Twain or stenographic accounts of his speeches in exchange items in newspapers as far apart as San Francisco, St. Louis, Rapid City, West Liberty (Iowa), Chicago, and Grand Rapids. I wonder if there are any considerable papers of the time which do not have information about Twain in their files. Last year, while doing research on the author Dan De Quille in back issues of some Comstock newspapers, I came upon a number of items that contained new information on Twain's life and career. The newspapers had been previously checked only for articles obviously relating to Twain but everything else had been ignored.

Not long ago, I tracked Twain on three of his lecture tours to Michigan in 1868-69, 1871, and 1884 simply by reading back issues of newspapers in some of the towns he visited and also those of nearby communities. Those trips had been written about very competently by Paul Fatout,[4] Guy Cardwell,[5] and Fred Lorch[6], and

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[3] Branch, Edgar M. "A Proposed Calendar of Samuel Clemens's Steamboats, 15 April 1857 to 8 May 1861, with Commentary." Mark Twain Journal 24:2 (Fall 1986) [1988], 2-27.

[4] Fatout, Paul. Mark Twain on the Lecture Circuit. Bloomington: Indiana U P, 1960.

[5] Cardwell, Guy. Twins of Genius. East Lansing, MI: 1953.

[6] Lorch, Fred W. The Trouble Begins at Eight: Mark Twain's Lecture Tours. Ames: U of Iowa P, 1968.

there is an excellent article about his visit to Lansing.[7] Nevertheless I found new and usable information in newspapers in Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, Marshall, Charlotte, and Manchester. More remains to be found in Michigan, as it probably does wherever he traveled.

The point I wish to make is not that periodicals contribute to what we know about Twain but that it would be absolutely impossible to know a major part of what we have learned about Twain without periodicals. Inasmuch as there are usually significant textual differences between the book versions of works that we are familiar with and the earlier periodical versions, you can easily imagine how much material is involved. Some items even had several textual variants in periodicals before being fixed in final book versions.

What I have just said about Twain studies would apply, mutatis mutandi, to most other American authors. A surprisingly large number of nineteenth-century authors published in newspaper contributions: Stephen Crane, the Transcendentalists, Melville, Hawthorne, Whitman are names that come to mind. But practically everybody below the rank of major author is left, and even some major authors are left.

Just last year, a scholar located what appear to be the major sources for Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" in an obscure Pennsylvania magazine. Hardly anyone knows that Ambrose Bierce wrote for San Francisco magazines and newspapers for forty years.

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[7] Moffett, Wallace B. "Mark Twain's Lansing Lecture on Roughing It." Michigan History Magazine 34:2 (June 1950), 144-170.

My work on Bierce is based on my discovery that most of his stories appeared first in newspaper versions whose texts differed significantly from those in his Collected Works edition of 1909-1912, and that other material published in the newspaper helped illuminate the stories. Other scholars have recovered from various magazines Bierce fables and definitions that he did not include in his Devil's Dictionary. New "old" essays by Frank Norris were republished in 1987[8]; a search is presently underway for more lost material. Scholars are locating important uncollected articles and reviews by Joel Chandler Harris in files of Georgia newspapers.[9] In twentieth-century literature, three uncollected Jack London's stories were published in book form in 1983 and one rediscovered essay appeared as recently as last October.[10] Although there presently is no collection of the complete short stories of

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[8] McElrath, Joseph R., Jr. "Frank Norris at Del Monte: Two New Wave Essays from 1895." American Literary Realism 20:1 (Fall 1987), 56-70.

[9] See, for example, Monenyohl, Eric L. "Joel Chandler Harris' Revision of Uncle Remus: The First Version of 'A Story of the War.' "American Literary Realism 19:1 (Fall 1986), 65-72.

[10] London, Jack. A Klondike Trilogy: Three Uncollected Stories. Ed. Earle Labor. Santa Barbara, CA: Neville, 1983; Labor, Earle and Robert C. Leitz, III. "Jack London on Alexander Berkman: An Unpublished Introduction." American Literature 61:3 (Oct. 1989): 447-456.

Sinclair Lewis, one scholar is at last readying such an edition from uncollected stories located in the periodicals in which they originally appeared.

In addition to famous authors and minor authors, there are also authors who have been unjustly neglected or even accidentally forgotten. "Unjustly neglected" is an honorable phrase we can all understand but how can someone be accidentally forgotten? Practically every literary periodical contains stories, essays, and poems by authors who wrote a few excellent pieces but not enough to make a book, ow who simply failed for some reason to collect their writings into a book. Not having a book in print practically equals being forgotten. Nevertheless, such material can be recovered if periodicals are searched with an open mind.

An anthology of some choice items collected from Bret Harte's Overland Monthly (1868-69) was published in 1987.[11] The book is both instructive and entertaining, and supplies information that any student of the period would want to know, even though most of the authors represented have been forgotten. Another volume is being prepared to cover the years 1870-75. If similar anthologies are not prepared from even better magazines like the Century and Scribner's we will be deprived of fascinating and useful information.

In the back issues of local newspapers and regional and national magazines are authors whose works, if known, would cause us to change some of our views about familiar literary figures and

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[11] Bennett, Robert A. The Bohemians: American Adventures from Bret Harte's "Overland Monthly." Walla Walla, WA: Pioneer, 1987.

perhaps about our entire field. Herland (1915), the now widely known novel of the celebrated early feminist writer, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, remained unread in the files of a minor magazine entitled The Forerunner until its book publications in 1979. Gilman's famous short story, "The Yellow Wallpaper," was not published in a correct text until several months ago! Dan De Quille is another such author. In his lifetime he had a national reputation but he did not republish his stories in an anthology and so was almost forgotten as a writer of fiction. By this fall, more than 15 articles and editions of individual stories will have been published on him recently, and three books, including two of my own, will have been published on him the last two years alone. Information gathered in the course of De Quille research has, in some cases, direct and surprising application to Mark Twain scholarship.

I know offhand of other rewarding Western authors who have been allowed to be forgotten: the Sagebrusher Sam Davis and the Overlander James W. Gally. Presently obscure Comstock newsmen deserve to be salvaged. Let me quote a passage from one few American literature scholars know about. His name was Jim Townsend, and he was once highly regarded by his colleagues on the eastern slope of the Sierra Madres. I extract from his editorial description of an avalanche, entitled "Angular Sounds":

Last Saturday the camp was in a high fever of fear. All day long snowslides were tumbling and thundering, bringing down immense masses of rock and timber and piling them up into grotesque and fantastic mounds, some of which were of hugh dimensions. Everybody

was nervously anxious, for disastrous results seemed imminent. The gloomiest anticipations prevailed. Both walls of the narrow canyon were covered with immense banks of snow ready to fall and entomb us, and no one place appeared to be more secure than another.

In the morning a terrific slide came down from a deep gorge on the northern flank of Mount Gilcrest. Starting at a point about 3,000 feet above the town, it was augmented by slides from confluent canyons until its proportions were enormous, and with accelerated velocity charged down the precipitous hill like a flood of molten silver. When it struck the lake there was a thundering crash of six-foot ice, followed instantly by cannonlike reports on the other side of the lake, as compressed air escaped from blow-holes in the ice. Some of these vents, however, emitted sounds like the hoarse roar of a steam fog-horn with a bad cold; others shrieked like seduced angels on the ragged edge of repentance and despair, while more seemed to howl with demonic glee over the wreck and ruin that threatened us.

For several minutes the air was filled with angular sounds punctuated by the cracking reports of artillery, as the ice was rent into great cakes and thrown in heaps along the margin of the lake. This diabolical fracas of clatter and smash was followed by silence that oppressed us like a nightmare. After a brief interval another slide started from the southern escarpment of Mt. Hector, on the opposite side of the lake. As it gathered material it accumulated speed, rolling over and over like breakers on a sloping shore and throwing feathery spray hundreds of yards ahead, until it shot out upon the lake like a flash and lay an inert mass of

weirdly and appallingly grand, so startling in its magnificence that the few beholders were prompted to kneel in adoration. It is at one awful and sublime to see a large slice of the earth in swift motion, but the sensation becomes one of abject fear when a person realizes the infinite danger that hovers in the track of one of these fascinating spectacles.

At noon of the same day there were two other slides, following each other in quick succession, converging at the lower ends so that they blended and became a single destroying monster. These started back of the Lundy brewery, and slid so noiselessly that our local beer factory looked like an italic almshouse before it was known that another avalanche had occurred. The large building was wiped out and spread out like soft butter upon hot bread. Its usefulness is no longer apparent, for it and its contents were ground into microscopic fragments....

This is vivid prose, writing that only a master stylist could compose. This and enough other pieces like it to make a small book that preserves the flavor of mining life a century ago were rescued from back issues of an obscure newspaper from the small, now extinct mining town of Lundy, Nevada.[12] Townsend was not an isolated exception. Western periodicals abounded in editors, newspapermen, and contributors of surprising talent; so did those of the rest of the country.

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[12] Dwyer, Richard A., and Richard E. Lingenfelter. Lying on the Eastern Slope: James Townsend's Comic Journalism on the Mining Frontier. Miami: University Presses of Florida: Florida Atlantic U, 1984.

the country.

Literary scholars in recent years have discovered and brought to light a sizeable number of works that were lost or neglected: e.g. books by women and accounts of Western emigration and settlement that were once thought too slight or too regional to be of interest; journals of former slaves; narratives of people captured by Indians. Many of these works had once been published as books and then forgotten; some few of them were found as manuscripts in archives. In addition, every section of the country has impressive local writers whom we have allowed to be forgotten because they were not as good as Melville or Twain at their best or members of an intellectual coterie as famous as thee Transcendentalists. Are those good reasons? Even Melville and Twain penned some works of marginal quality that would not be read today if anyone else had written them. There are many local or presently obscure or forgotten periodical authors who, although not of the first rank, nevertheless wrote works considerably more readable--and more valuable--than the potboilers of the great. Octave Thanet is such a one. A collection of her Arkansas tales, including some unexpectedly powerful ones, was first gathered from magazines in 1980[13]; now another scholar is assembling her Iowa stories. Mary Austin is another author who is enjoying a rebirth. Amazingly, not until 1974 were almost all of the short stories and

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[13] By the Cypress Swamp: The Arkansas Stories of Octave Thanet. Ed. Michael B. and Carol W. Dougan. Little Rock, AR: Rose, 1980.

of as fine an author as Charles W. Chesnutt located in periodicals and at last put together in book form.[14]

The field of periodical literature is still being mapped. Edward Chielens has published several useful surveys of this area.[15] David E.E. Sloane has recently published a valuable study of regional anthologies of humor.[16] As good as these guides are, they must be supplemented and followed by specific studies if we are to accurately comprehend our own literature.

The American canon cannot be complete until we have made a more systematic search for "new" lost or forgotten works by known authors, and for "new" old authors who have been accidentally or mistakenly lost and forgotten. No one knows how many of them there may be, but each region within the United States almost certainly has some. Sooner, I hope, rather than later, American literary and historical scholars will emulate their counterparts in English studies by systematically cataloguing and studying all periodicals. Our job will be larger than it has been for those studying English culture because there were more American periodicals. But from the

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[14] The Short Fiction of Charles W. Chesnutt. Ed. w/intro. Sylvia Lyons Render. Washington, D.C.: Howard U P, 1974.

[15] Chielens, Edward. The Literary Journal in America to 1900: A Guide to Information Sources. Detroit: Gale, 1975; The Literary Journal in America, 1900-1950: A Guide to Information Sources. Detroit: Gale, 1977; American Literary Magazines: The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries. New York: Greenwood, 1986.

[16] Sloane, David E. E. ed. American Humor Magazine and Comic Periodicals. New York: Greenwood, 1987.

studies by systematically cataloguing and studying all periodicals. Our job will be larger than it has been for those studying English culture because there were more American periodicals. But from the riches we have recovered so far in a sporadic manner, it is clear that this enterprise should be viewed as one of the most substantial and rewarding opportunities for American scholarship far into the future.